

Cat and Dog Theology

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Preacher: John French

[0:00] Morning, church. Sorry. I'd just like to quickly poll the audience. And so you are going to have to put up your hands.

Hands up if you have pets. Okay, it's about 50%. Righto. Righto. Hands up if you have a dog. Yep. Hands up if you have a cat. Go on. Hands up if you've got both. Okay, there's a few of us. Righto. Well, would it be fair to say that the following are sort of traits or characteristics of these two animals?

And by the way, the pets you keep I don't think is necessarily a reflection that you're like this either. So for cats, would it be fair to say they tend to be selfish?

Self-obsessed? Lazy? Predatory? Precious? And pampered? I don't have a cat, but you'll notice we've got a sort of adopted one.

[1:10] Just at the bottom in the centre there, there's two shots. That's Elvis. It's the neighbour's cat. He's got this thing, do not feed. So we don't feed Elvis. But he still comes, obviously, he finds shelter at our house because the neighbours have got little kids.

And it's maybe calmer at our house. I don't know. But Elvis is there. I've put a rug on our front lounge on the veranda because I don't want him putting hair all over the actual lounge.

So that's him sleeping on the red checkered picnic rug. But the other one there is if we leave the door open, he sneaks into the house. So the one with the green cushions, I found him of all places. As I can tell you now, I'm not a pet person. He was asleep on my pillow, on my side of the bed.

That's mental. Come on, Elvis. Of all the people. Anyway, that's cats.

What about dogs? Would it be fair to say that dogs are faithful, loyal, friendly, protective, best friend? Again, a friend's dog.

[2:13] Look, on the top right, you can see that's Humphrey. And he's worked out how to pop the toaster. And so there's actually film footage that Campbell put on Instagram of him hopping up, popping it, popping it, and then catching the toast as it comes out.

Now, even the bottom of the freezer has a padlock on it. And he eats anything. I don't know if you've got a Labrador, but he's eaten the Xbox controller. He got into the laundry and he ate a 10-kilo bag of dried things.

And he was lying there, bloated, and they had to take him to the vet. And he was there licking, like, still, I've got to keep eating, even though, like, he was really quite crook. He's eaten the snake that stops the draft. And they had to spend 16 grand at the vets because they didn't have pet insurance to get it out of his messed up.

Anyway, that's Humphrey. Anyone who knows me knows that I'm not even slightly into pets, but I'm happy for you if that's your thing. And I'm actually happy to pet it and let it go home to its owners. I don't have the time or the interest or desire to financially invest in having a pet, but I could change my mind when we become empty nesters. So it sounds a bit double standard, doesn't it?

[3:26] Well, if you're one of those people who is suspicious of people who don't like pets, please stay with me. Don't get me wrong. Animals are amazing. 100% we need to look after God's creatures and be good stewards of God's good creation.

But Jesus didn't die on the cross for your pets. If you didn't know I wasn't into pets, you do know now. But in this newfound knowledge, it may surprise you that this morning's talk will be dealing with the differences between humankind's preferred domestic creatures, cats and dogs.

There's this book. It's called Cat and Dog Theology. It's by Bob Sogren and Gerard Robinson. And I think they've made some excellent insights into people in today's church and the attitude of their hearts.

So today's topic will only touch on that Bible passage. It's not exegetical. Today's talk is topical. And I've gleaned some ideas from this book, from reading it.

And I want to apply it to us treasuring Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all people through mission. So knowing there are animal lovers of each, I hope that no one takes offense at me acknowledging these traits, these beloved animals.

[4:40] No offense is intended. My apologies to cat lovers. They aren't painted in a very good light at all. Righto. The basic premise of the book goes something like this.

A dog says, A cat says, In nature, these attitudes are instinctive for cats and dogs.

Cats and dogs have certain attitudes that are similar to ones we have in our view of God and our relationship to him.

Spiritual dogs say, Dogs have masters, characterized with traits like loyalty, service, and faithfulness.

Spiritual cats say, Cats have staff. They have acquired traits like independence and aloofness.

[6:02] While spiritual cats never really say, I must be God. They do say, It's all about me. God, do all this for me. I'm not only who God died for, but who God lives for as well.

So I hope today we can differentiate these attitudes and examine our own hearts. Repent where needed and draw closer to God. At the very center of our lives, as individuals and as a church, must be the desire to worship God with all of our lives.

We exist and we were created for God's glory. We need to live our lives, not putting ourselves at the center, but by putting God at the center.

Seeking not to live our lives for ourselves, but for God. That's the life God has created us to live.

And when we live life that way, we not only please God, but we experience life in all its fullness.

God's purpose for us is to worship him. To love God and not focus on ourselves, but glorify Jesus who saves us, gives us purpose in life, and provides us an eternal home.

[7:08] We worship God and express our love through obeying his commands. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. Love theologically, spiritual dogs want to obey these commands from God.

It's all about love. They desire to do this not because it's some chore, but because they love God.

But spiritual cats want God to obey them. In our churches, the difference between spiritual cats and dogs is clearly seen in what motivates them.

Cats focus on their lives, their needs, their wants. Their prayers contain lots of me's and my's. It's about feeling good. Being a Christian is what's in it for me.

Their concern is how to manipulate God to give them what they want rather than to know God.

Prayer is about. Bless me. Protect me. Take care of me.

Give me good health. Give me a safe and secure, comfortable lifestyle. They believe church exists to meet their needs. And if it doesn't, they're your typical church hoppers.

[8:13] Staying somewhere for a few years and they're moving on when they aren't pampered. Like sourpusses, they grow bitter overlooking their needs. Their real need. Spiritual maturity.

Self-righteous, they have trouble saying sorry. Somewhere down the list is the glory of God.

Imagine if spiritual cats could design a church. A church where cats passionately, wholeheartedly and recklessly call the shots.

I have a busy week. By the time Sunday rolls around, I'm tired. So how about church starts when I get there? Can do. When you arrive, we begin.

I'm not comfortable when preaching from God's word calls me to change. I want a church where I'm not the bad person. Say no more. We'll tell you how good you are.

Do you feel better? Financially, things are tight. I can't really afford to give to the church. No worries.

Pass the plate along. When I'm in church service, can I have my car buffed and waxed?

[9:20] We'll even give it an oil change and a tune-up as well. How about a ticket to the grand final? No problem. We'll get you there. I'd like a pony. Look in your backyard.

Me, church, it's all about you. Cats are in it for themselves. For cats' life is primarily not about God.

It's about them. Cats are into Christianity far more for what they can get out of it than for the opportunity to radiate the glory of the King of Heaven.

Cats don't have joy. They have relief. A cat says, I don't want to go to hell. Praise the Lord. We're not going to hell. And when cats do this, they're primarily focused on themselves.

They walk backwards, focused on hell, constantly looking back at the life that they've been rescued from and still actually feeling like they're missing out on something. They occasionally catch glimpses of Christ as they glance over their shoulders, but their focus is only on their lives. Their salvation is basically fire insurance. Dogs say no. Life is about God's glory. The first and foremost priority of the spiritual dogs is that God be glorified.

[10 : 33] Dogs want to get to Heaven for a different reason. They can't wait to see their loving master, Jesus. Dogs walk forward. Hell is behind them and Heaven is in front.

They aren't afraid to suffer or be persecuted or threatened for Jesus. And in those times, they like to shine the love of Jesus. Even timid dogs pray for boldness.

They aren't ashamed of Jesus. Dogs say, Someone has found me who is not only beautiful, he is beauty, he is powerful. He is almighty. He is love.

I want to give my life to Jesus. Dogs have a passion for God's glory. In the passage just read to us from John chapter 12, Jesus makes clear the primary purpose of his death on the cross, God's glory.

Jesus said, Now my heart is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

[11 : 39] Father, glorify your name. At that point, the bit where it says, Father, the cat would pause and say, Save these people, your wonderful creation from hell.

But Jesus concluded, Father, glorify your name. Not what would you expect. But Jesus' primary focus is on glorifying God. And then a voice from heaven came for our benefit and their benefit.

I have glorified it and I'll glorify it again. And we see that at the cross, in Jesus' death and resurrection. It reveals God's glory and gives God the glory.

God calls us to love and worship with every part of our being. That's to glorify God 24-7. Living in loving fellowship and reaching out in love to the lost who need salvation gives God the glory.

So we treasure Jesus individually and corporately for the joy of all people. When Jesus said, Go and make disciples of all nations, God's mission and outreach are not a priority for cats.

[12 : 46] Mission requires personal involvement and that means way too much sacrifice. Cats have their foot in the door and that's all that matters. Spiritual cats may think mission is a good idea.

They might sit around and say, We should do mission or I wish more people were mission-minded or grumble about how their church is actually going about running mission but they actually don't do mission.

They just talk about it. When the real needs of the world are exposed, cats want to quietly and politely nap. Giving to support mission is out of guilt.

When the church wants to equip them or ask them to minister to others, cats run and complain. It's outside their comfort zone. Cats responds to mission. What about the needs of the people right here?

Or don't throw away all the talents that God has given us by sending them all overseas or somewhere else. Cats like to look the part as followers of Jesus when it's convenient and if they can get praise from others.

[13 : 50] Though they'd never say it, if something or someone could give them a better life than following Christ, they would seriously consider it. Mission for them requires an exterior air of practices that people see so they can be noticed as doing God's work when really they're putting on an act.

Cats are so self-focused, they lose sight of the mission. When it means they have to speak up in the workplace and when it gets hard or difficult or demands money or too much time, then they go silent, pull back, drop out, because their motives are all wrong and there's no commitment to God's mission, just a commitment to self.

In light of mission, spiritual dogs realise that God's greatest glory will be when his people shine the light of Jesus for every tribe and nation. C.S. Lewis once said, don't shine so that others can see you, shine so that through you others can see Jesus.

They take care in order that their motives are pure to glorify God. Mission is about reaching the lost. They know they are forgiven and this side of heaven, because of sin, they know that they're not going to be fully sorted but Christ is working in them and living in them and working through them. They're taking their next steps in their walk with Jesus and they have a genuine concern for those who aren't saved yet. They're even prepared to be bold. They care more about what God sees and

what God thinks rather than what others see and think.

[15 : 30] Dogs know they struggle with sin and so they repent and have a transformation of their minds and their hearts as they're fully reliant on God's grace and they get on with mission as they're concerned for the lost.

When they hear God's call, when Jesus said, go, their highest priority in life is seeing God's glory go to all peoples of the earth. They know the hope we have in Jesus and know they want no one to be lost.

They look for every opportunity, point people to Jesus in their life, speech and actions even if it brings hard times. They have hobbies but their greatest passion is Jesus so they use their hobbies to point people to Jesus whether it's football or horses or music or arts, sports or fishing or animals, gardening, cars or even line dancing.

They don't just see these as times to self-indulge and escape like cats. They see these as an opportunity, as something that God has gifted them with and has put them on their hearts to reach out and share the good news of Jesus with people with similar interests.

When it comes to mission, dogs are open to serving wherever God sends them. They support mission through sacrificial giving and are prayerful for gospel mission.

[16 : 53] They're active in mission in their daily lives at home, in the workplace, in reaching out to their local community. Whatever their vocation, they consider a life-glorifying God is their life mission.

mission. They see where God has them right now. They see that as their mission field. They're keen to be equipped to have conversations, to share the love of Jesus.

Mission is life. Life is mission. They know the gospel is for the joy of all people. So dogs can't wait to be in heaven around God's throne with people from all nations.

I'm just going to rattle off a few more contrasts. For cats, repentance is out. Self-esteem and works righteousness are in. For dogs, repentance is part of life.

Holiness and irresistible grace are in. Cats hunger to be entertained at church. Dogs hunger to worship God and reflect his glory. Cats want to prosper with God as their vending machine.

[17 : 57] Dogs are at peace and content in Christ no matter their situation and circumstance. Cats love head knowledge. Bible trivia is fun but they're selective when it comes to application.

It's about bless me Lord. So they love the passages about bless me Lord but if it talks about suffering for Christ or obedience then let's leave that little bit out.

Dogs love God's word as it brings them closer to God. They're more interested in obeying the Lord than simply knowing about him. Cats see an immigrant family moving in next door and think there goes the neighbourhood.

Dogs see it as an opportunity to reveal God's glory to people from another culture. Cats want their children to bring them glory. Dogs want their children to bring glory to God. Cats see a job as a means of attaining wealth and dogs see a job as a ministry opportunity.

When and if cats give they do it begrudgingly and out of guilt. Dogs are sacrificial givers. Even when they have little as this honours God and brings God glory. So I feel like you get the picture.

[19 : 06] As I conclude dogs say preach it and the cats say wrap it up. This hasn't been about whether or not you love cats or dogs or you prefer one to the other.

The idea of cat and dog theology is that these traits reflect the way we respond in our relationship with God. Our motives, priorities and attitudes of our hearts and our walk with God.

For spiritual cats God's you exist to serve me and spiritual dogs I exist to serve God. And it's true there may be a bit of cat and dog split personality in all of us.

Sin lives within us and means we naturally live like spiritual cats putting ourselves at the centre of life. Will you continue to live like a spiritual cat?

Will you put God at the centre of your life? Will we ask God to change our lives and have a heart like a spiritual dog? Living a God-centred life glorifying Christ obeying and serving the living God living for God and living for others.

[20 : 13] I've only been here eight or nine months I don't know you all well enough to actually have targeted anyone here so don't feel like I've targeted anyone in any way. This is between you and God and we all need to examine our hearts and take our next step in treasuring Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

Spiritual cat or spiritual dog? Which one are you?